

## Problems of New Zealand Material

M. G. Hitchings

"The tradition of an island need not be insularity" (1 p. 10). This was said by J. C. Beaglehole in 1954 during the course of an address on the New Zealand scholar, but most of my remarks on the topic presently being discussed will be concerned with assisting enquirers into aspects of New Zealand history.

I am not at all sure in this context what the word "research" means. The "grandfather hunter" can, if the librarian feels so inclined, as occasionally and for various reasons he must be, fully extend the complete resources of a New Zealand collection and all the experience and ingenuity of its librarian. Normally this sort of enquiry is not graced with the term research, but the process of finding what has been recorded of a particular person's arrival in this country, or the fate of a box of Maori carvings sent to England by Thomas Kendall in 1823, or what went on in Dunedin in 1869 when whisky was being distilled there, legally, or just when John Guard set up his shore whaling station at Te Awaitei, or what collections Herbert Williams had access to in compiling his *Bibliography of Printed Maori*; all these have something in common from the librarian's point of view, whether it be termed research or reference.

Perhaps what is common is indicated by the librarian's own question to himself when faced with such queries: "Where does one start?"; and as the search proceeds, "Where does one stop?", for all too frequently there is the feeling that the answer lies somewhere at hand if only it can be alighted on. That there is a paucity of bibliographical aids and indexes in the New Zealand field has been fully appreciated throughout the years and has been stated many many times. Meetings of this Association have provided more than one occasion for attempts to arrange systematic attacks on the problem, but on the whole there have been only sporadic scurries of activity. Lists of books and early journals requiring indexing have been drawn up, and responsibility for separate titles taken by individuals or institutions, but the results have been meagre. The indexing of Provincial Council papers has been discussed time and again, but, to the best of my knowledge, it is only in the last year that any one Council's has actually been completed, and significantly that has been done in the Alexander Turnbull Library. Administering authorities, possibly even some librarians themselves, need to be convinced that doing work such as this is an integral

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part of a library's responsibility and is not a peripheral activity to be indulged in by librarians as a winter hobby. Consequently library staff establishments need to be of a size that enables this work to be carried out on a day-to-day basis.

The Library School has published some very worthwhile bibliographies, and some libraries have typescript versions of others that have not come up to publication standard, but which nevertheless prove useful. Perhaps the School could look back through its files and issue, in one or the other form, selected work done prior to the start of the publishing programme. Possibly also, over a period of years the School could find time to interest one or two students in indexing, and publish the results of their work. Indeed, as far as bibliographies and indexes go, there is much to be said for the London practice of these being required at the end of the year following attendance at the School, before the Diploma is granted.

Most libraries have unpublished indexes of one sort or another, and of varying standards of quality; of newspapers or a few journals and books of local significance. The suggestion has already been made that copies should be distributed, but libraries, for the sake of their own reputations, have been reluctant to place their imprint on them. However, now that xerox copying is so readily available, a false air of authority would not be lent to these indexes by issuing them in restricted numbers, as would have been the case in the past simply by the labour of cutting stencils.

Where does one start? Certainly it is not invariably with the card catalogue, that frustrating and at times positively obstructionist tool. A few years ago a retired legal man in Wellington worked consistently over a long period in the Turnbull Library on the life of one of his precursors in this country. As a librarian, I was shocked when, after some months, he quite diffidently asked me to show him how the catalogue worked. For some reason Turnbull has not been noted for its cataloguers, but Hocken has—and the same problem exists there. During the past year that library has numbered among its readers two very careful enquirers into the fields that claim their attention. A recent book issued by one of them has been favourably reviewed as to its standard of scholarship. But both these men have an aversion to consulting the catalogue, even for what we in the trade might call a simple author entry. These are the actions, not of lackadaisical men, but of men eager to hunt out the smallest and most remote detail of information relevant to their enquiries.

Perhaps these examples point to the basic problem that exists, to a greater or lesser degree, in all fields of library research. It is, that there is a lack of communication between librarian and reader. The card catalogue is a device meant to ease communication, but it is a demonstrably clumsy one. The *Union List of Theses*, the *Union Catalogue of Manuscripts*, the lists of *Early Printed Books in the Alexander Turnbull Library*, and so on, are attempts on the librarian's part to inform his readers. But all too frequently the research worker does not

learn of the existence of such works at the very outset of his investigation when they would be most useful to him. It is shocking that experienced research workers should not know of the existence of the Union Catalogue of Manuscripts, but there have been such and doubtless there still are. It is equally outrageous that a University Senior Lecturer should not have known that the xeroxed *Catalogue of the Bishop Museum Library* has been on his university library's shelves practically the whole time he had been bemoaning to himself the fact that he did not have access to it.

There are well tried devices for overcoming this situation—notes to readers, accessions lists, display notices, and so on—but it is obvious they are not wholly effective. The fundamental answer lies undoubtedly in lively, knowledgeable and experienced reference staffs. Reference staffs should not be so burdened with inter-library loan, photocopying and other routines that they have little time to acquire true knowledge of the material they should be handling, and as a result, fail to develop historical sensitivity and that intuition which leads them quickly to the right source. A. L. Smyth, speaking at a 1960 Library Association conference in Birmingham, referred to the importance of personal association between librarian and reader, saying, "Here surely is one of the highest forms of librarianship which is found too infrequently today in public libraries (and perhaps also in University libraries) where the main emphasis tends to be on administration." (2 p. 18) If by administration Mr Smyth means the sorts of things I have described as overwhelming reference staffs, then the same is true of New Zealand.

Another part of the answer, particularly in historical research collections, lies in the card catalogue itself, and in the way certain sections of the collections are shelved. There is probably little doubt that the card catalogue will not radically change its form for quite some years. Very often the research worker does not know what he wants, although he does know the major figures in his field and the period in which they were active. It is a laborious but rewarding business for a worker to be able systematically to turn over main entry cards of all publications in a collection issued within his period. It is particularly rewarding if he is able to go to the shelves and find together all pamphlets published during a particular span of time, for conventional subject cataloguing of pamphlets cannot possibly cover all the uses to which they may be put. This chronological arrangement of catalogues and certain publications has much to commend it, and in part accounts for the continued great value of Hocken's *Bibliography of the Literature relating to New Zealand*.

It is a cataloguing axiom that attention should be directed to the specific rather than the general, but is it necessarily true? Trimble's printed *Catalogue of the Hocken Library* (1912) is something of a cataloguer's and classifier's oddity, but it is still useful occasionally to turn to his very broad subject groupings, within which, on the whole, material is arranged chronologically. Under the one heading

"Agriculture" for example, he lists publications, entries for which are scattered in half a dozen or more places in the card catalogue. The person interested in ships is often better served by being able to turn over a block of cards arranged under that heading and then by name of vessel, rather than having to chase all over the catalogue for vessels entered directly. Other broad groupings prove equally useful.

In the Pacific and New Zealand field, for lack of better sources, unsatisfactory publications still have to be consulted; and in some respects the card catalogue is a positive hindrance to research. To enable a collection to realise its full potential, it needs skilled interpretation by a readily approachable and experienced librarian. For that librarian to be able to acquire his experience and skill he needs not only training, but also administrative attention paid to his situation to relieve him of routine clerical work and to give him the status and salary prospects that will encourage him to remain with a collection, and increase his knowledge of it by assisting enquirers, and by bibliographising and indexing. Particularly is this true of specialist positions—manuscripts, pictures, photographs and maps.

New Zealand history is concerned as much with the Maori as with the European, and there is much material written in Maori in our specialist historical collections. It is unfortunate, however, that not one of those collections appears ever to have had a competent Maori linguist on its staff, with the result that this material has remained largely unknown and unused, and to a degree its actual arrangement in those collections is a barrier to its use. I am fairly sure that this lack of expertise in Maori language was a prime reason for the recent gift of a sizeable collection of Maori manuscripts, not to the Auckland Public Library or the Alexander Turnbull Library, but to a newly established university. This seems unfortunate, but perhaps in the long run facsimiles will find their way to one or other of the major collections in this field.

It is fully appreciated that foreign languages are a problem in all specialist—not simply in New Zealand historical—collections. One way and another, other collections have at least some aids to enable them to cope, however inadequately, with the situation. Some device needs to be found to attract even one Maori reader to a New Zealand collection. Perhaps the North American practice of having consultants could form something of a model. As it is, library staffs are already fully committed and this would be just one more demand on tight salary budgets: but this demand needs to be got into the queue of priorities, possibly even put to the head of the queue by raising a sufficient grant from some agency either local or overseas, for pay for a supernumerary for perhaps a year in the first instance. If such a person was a recent M.A. graduate, he might as a result be attracted permanently into library work, which would be a happy solution indeed. Inevitably, however, if he were not allowed to get on with his speciality he would leave. Even a year's work by a licensed interpreter or other competent linguist would at least help in organising the collections to



the degree that they would become more usable and better known, and thus create their own demand for proper library attention. In 1947, a Library School student, Miss A. D. Somerville, turned out a most useful supplement to Williams's *Bibliography of Printed Maori*. Although quite understandable at that time, Miss Somerville should not really have been allowed to sever all connection with this field.

Maori material forms but a small proportion of the source material of our history. Much of all that source material however, has been lost to the historian and librarian by reason of its destruction, and a further goodly proportion remains inaccessible simply because of lack of knowledge of its existence. J. C. Beaglehole in *The New Zealand Scholar* regretted that some of our history will never be unfolded now, saying, "We have only too effectively destroyed it in our holocausts of records. No one is more adept than the New Zealander in paying lip-service to the past, and in destroying the means of knowing it. . . . We have hacked at the tree of our tradition with the murderous inconsequence of adolescent vandals in a public park. We have burnt our history with the same blind stupidity as we have burnt our forests." (1 p. 23) This wanton destruction of records continues apace today, despite the advances of the Archives Act and the creation of regional repositories for government records. It is now rather the continued destruction of private records that is of concern. From instances known to me, I suspect the scale of destruction is much greater than is generally realised. Material, often associated with names which are bywords in our history, and which it is practically inconceivable that anyone today would casually discard, is in fact being destroyed. This being so, it is understandable that letters, diaries, photographs and pictures of non-public figures are also rapidly disappearing. Very frequently it is a result of people having to face the necessity of quickly clearing out a house on the death of a relative, or perhaps simply the sale of a house; and a general lack of appreciation of the value of records. Many people, when asked for records of one sort or another for a library collection are frequently quite vehement that, despite the library's asking, it could not possibly be interested in these things. Once their diffidence, almost humility, about the value of records they possess is overcome, it is then that the sorry tale of further material already destroyed comes out.

The only effective answer to this problem is for libraries constantly to publicise their wish to preserve records, and to approach business firms and individuals known to possess manuscripts and other records. Newspaper and popular magazine articles, talks to organised groups, tours of libraries by school parties, and similar activities are all effective to a degree. However the job is really a public relations one, and consideration needs to be given to using the usual advertising media—press, radio and television. Occasional featured articles or programmes do not have the impact of repeated announcements. The Hocken Library has made enquiries regarding the cost of advertising on the air and has found that it is within the capabilities of its budget. Two

things have delayed the start of such a venture however. One is not very serious. Naturally the shorter the time on the air the lower the cost, and I have a slight reservation in accepting some such catch-cry as, "Hocken Library time—Historical time—8 o'clock!", as being quite in keeping with the decorum usually associated with learned institutions. The other thing is also related to time, but in this case it is the library's. Visiting people and taking in manuscripts and other material is a laborious business. Even now, the Hocken Library does not really have the staff to cope with existing activity on this front. With the present establishment, an upsurge in activity would divert attention from other responsibilities, so it remains for us to determine the proper priority for advertising. In the long run however, the cost of such activity in time and money must be borne, and looked on simply as the purchase price of the material so gained.

The other aspect of inaccessible source material has been tackled on an impressive scale by the Australians, with the New Zealanders so far, not untypically, hanging on to their coat tails. Shortly after the end of the Second World War, the Australian National Library (as it was to become) and the Mitchell Library, Sydney, set up a Joint Copying Project. The purpose was to make available in Australia, microfilm copies of manuscript records in England that relate to Australia and the Pacific, including New Zealand. The original intention was also to include other European source material, but little of this has in fact been done. In England however, tens of thousands of documents in the Public Record Office, various Missionary Society headquarters and other repositories have now been filmed. New Zealand has benefited from this scheme in that copies of many of the films have been purchased by National Archives and the Turnbull Library (and a few by the Hocken Library), and in some instances part of the cost of making the negative has been paid. In a quite haphazard way, one or two New Zealanders have been associated with the London end of the scheme in searching collections and compiling inventories.

The result is that a good body of source material is now available in this country for consultation by scholars. It could have been better, if New Zealand's participation in the scheme had been placed on a more formal and planned basis. That it has still not been is regrettable, and although the present economic climate is most unpromising, the appointment of a government officer in London for work on this scheme and in connection with other library matters needs to be given high priority.

Within the Pacific basin itself, proposals have been made for a similar, but rather more widely based, co-operative venture designed also to avoid the duplication of effort that is undoubtedly going on between countries. About five years ago, the Gregg M. Sinclair Library, University of Hawaii, had a representative on the international road sounding out people's reactions to the possibility of such a scheme, but no firm action has as yet resulted. Although not related to this



scheme, it may be noted that the Library of Congress in mid-1965 set up a Center for the Coordination of Foreign Manuscripts Copying. This will undoubtedly gather in information relating to American activity in the Pacific field and there is every reason to suppose that that information will be made available to other countries, even if only through the medium of the Center's Reports. However a Pacific basin regional, internationally organised centre seems most desirable for much of the source material for Pacific history is itself of American origin. M Jean Guiart has set up his documentation centre in France, but I have no information on the effectiveness of its work.

Given the vast amount of material these schemes have brought or will bring into the country, is it sufficient to have single copies? My observation of researchers at their tasks suggests that 28-day inter-library loan from a central repository will not suffice in many instances. Some amusement was expressed at a Conference session last year when it was stated that a certain Professor of Philosophy not only wanted copies of articles from periodicals housed in his university library, but wanted them with the same speed we have become accustomed to according scientists; but the fact remains that that is what he considered necessary. He may be a lone figure at present, but he will not remain so. Past financial stringency, and the habit of thought engendered by the national preoccupation with being a small country, has for too long made us willing to accept the "one copy" standard. New Zealand is in fact a geographically extensive country from north to south, and it will not always be underpopulated. Continued financial stringency, however, will probably continue to provide the simple answer for many years to this problem of the centralisation of source materials.

Scientists are concerned at the proliferation of "non-published" reports and their restricted circulation. So far this has not been a problem in the historical field, but there are indications that a similar trend may develop, and it behoves librarians to endeavour to keep it to an absolute minimum. Over the last few years much archaeological work has been done in the Pacific with the aid of funds supplied by the U.S. National Science Foundation and administered by the Bernice P. Bishop Museum. Reports on fieldwork so undertaken are, as would be expected, supplied to the Museum and the Foundation. The writers of the reports also send copies to their archaeological associates, but libraries do not automatically receive copies, and as far as I know, the Bishop Museum does not receive a sufficient number to enable it to distribute them to selected libraries. One way and another the Hocken Library has managed to acquire copies of most of the reports. We have also written to Hawaii asking to be designated a New Zealand depository, and suggesting that the Alexander Turnbull Library at least should as well be placed on the list. It was considered necessary to make the most reasonable request possible, and it was felt that these two libraries, plus the number of Auckland archaeologists who have participated in the fieldwork, would sufficiently cater for New Zealand's

needs. Formal approaches of this sort in any other instance of non-publishing that may develop need to be made in order to ensure that essential source material will be available to future workers.

There is another area of non-publishing in the bookish sense, that historical research collections will need to get into, difficult as it now is to keep abreast of the traditional library materials. Prior to the last general election the Hocken Library, by writing to candidates, party electorate secretaries and many others, tried to gather up all printed material issued in connection with the electoral campaign. All people written to responded very well indeed, and we believe we have something approaching complete coverage of separately issued material, together with good information relating to newspaper reports of political meetings. Quite noticeably, however, the bulk of material printed and acquired in this planned way, is less than that of previous electoral campaigns. Radio and television have obviously made their inroads on this, as on many other fields.

The same trend has developed in other fields, and perhaps two fairly recent examples of planned programmes will suffice to indicate that important source material is not now finding its way on to paper. One was the hour-long radio programme on the late A. R. D. Fairburn, and in television there has been the programme on John A. Lee. In addition to these, and conceivably even more valuable, are the many spontaneous interviews and on-the-spot recordings of events. Numerous people tape-record programmes in the privacy of their own living-rooms for the passing entertainment of themselves and their friends, but the videotape recorder is not yet of a price to allow the same illegal activity. The New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation has its own Archives Section in Timaru, and tapes of all sound programmes that, in the opinion of the NZBC are worthy of preservation, are retained there. The fact of the existence of such an archive in this country is probably little known, and the contents of it even less so. Filmed material for television is kept either in local offices or in Head Office, according to the scope of the material's interest. Our specialist historical collections need to establish continuing contact with the NZBC so that this further record of the development of New Zealand may become known and accessible to scholars.

In this context it is also worth noting that National Archives has for many years interested itself in preserving cinematograph films. The scale of its operations is indicated by the fact that during the year ended March 1967, it received 47 documentaries, feature films and newsreels.

The foregoing has detailed, perhaps rather at length, some of the problems that face librarians and research workers in Pacific history and in allied fields. Some aspects of some problems and suggestions for their solution have possibly received a disproportionate amount of attention, but there is no grand solution which, if only arrived at, will set all historical collections to rights. Small advances on many fronts will only secure that happy situation, if such may ever

be said to exist. For example, Miss Evans' recently commenced practice of sending carbon duplicates of the inventories of her sets of manuscript papers to the other specialist collections in the country, seems to me a simple but very important development, which will surely become part of the routine of dealing with manuscript accessions in all historical collections. I do not believe however, that there are any particular implications in this for the Union Catalogue of Manuscripts which needs to be continued and published, either in its present or a refined form.

Two basic problems underlie most of what has been said. One is the lack of effective communication between librarian and reader. With clear thinking and ingenuity something can quite readily be done about this at present. The other is the lack of adequate financial resources to allow the proper expenditure in time and money that will enable historical collections to do a completely proper job. It is the task of library administrators to do something about this, but simply to say so is quite unhelpfully to state the obvious. It is worth stating however, for there are dangers in this "fact of library life", as our continued financial and staffing inadequacies were termed at a Conference session last year, becoming ingrained in our thinking.

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